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PUBLIC OPINION IN FOREIGN POLICIES

BY NORMAN ANGELL.

Discussions of this kind are sometimes vitiated by presenting a false antithesis or alternative. The discussion of war and peace and preparedness is often made as an issue between increasing military forces or leaving the forces as they are, or a method of force and no force—some such antithesis—whereas I beg to submit it isn't that at all in practice.

The real problem is, "How shall the force of mankind be used?" And the discussion is not really as between those who believe that it is possible to organize a world without force and those who think that in some way force of itself will solve the whole problem.

For however great your force may be, it will be ineffective to civilized ends unless you decide beforehand how it shall be used. It is sometimes said that if, in some wonderful way, England or France, had only been more prepared, this war would not have happened. Well that obviously isn't certain. Twenty years ago, for instance, there was a great advocacy of conscription in England; and for what purpose? For the purpose of fighting France. If that agitation succeeded and the general impulse and feeling had developed along the pathway on which they began, we would have had an Anglo-French War. I don't see quite how that would have aided our fight against the Germanic danger, if it be a danger.

More reasonably can we say that, if Germany had known for certain that England would have come into this war, had known that Italy would have gone against her, then she would have hesitated and possibly would not have precipitated war at all. But, in the absence of that knowledge, the force of those two nations, however much greater it may have been, would have had no deterrent influence. The thing which might have checked German aggression would not have been the existence of force, it would have been the existence of force plus the knowledge as to how it was going to be used.

That is why we must settle what our preparedness is for. What do we intend to do with this increasing power when we have it.

England has passed through one stage of pacifism—that is to say the John Bright and the Richard Cobden stage. Those men, who were concerned to keep peace for their country, found that the man of disorder, the Jingo, the man who desired to satisfy his temper by war, was always trying to find some excuse for increasing the military instrument, trying, as a matter of fact, to entangle his nation in order that the necessity for a greater military establishment should be apparent. The natural reaction to that attitude was to say, "For Heaven's sake, keep out of it," and for a half-century or so that was the dominant attitude of English pacifism.

But this war has demonstrated that it will not answer. We must go beyond that. We must pass out of that stage of mere passive inaction and recognize that we cannot live in isolation. You have a hundred of your citizens massacred on the high seas in a quarrel in which you are not concerned at all. Your industrial life is turned upside down by reason of a war which is going on in the other side of the world. For good or evil you are affected by issues which are there being fought out. *You must sooner or later intervene*, and the problem for the United States is "How shall we intervene?"

In all this, there is one thing that we seem to have overlooked. At bottom it is a question of will. If the world decided that it wanted to live at peace, it would. It hasn't come to that decision yet. This nation is not, as a matter of fact, at present interested in its foreign problem. It is far more interested in baseball. That is just a simple statement of fact. Chatting the other day with a journalist friend of mine, I asked him why the newspapers hadn't paid more attention since the *Lusitania* went down, to alternative methods of action, something other than war, the future foreign policy of the United States, things very relevant to the problem which was presented to us on the morning after the *Lusitania* was sunk, nearly a year ago. He said, "It is impossible copy. Our people are not interested in it, save when they think that there is going to be a war the day after tomorrow. For forty-eight hours

it would make good copy. From the moment the danger of war had passed, it would cease to be good copy."

Now, how can you have an informed public opinion when you cannot get a degree of continued attention, even as relative as that? Our first problem is to see how we can direct the attention of our people, how we can get the great mass to discuss, to realize the importance of foreign policies as affecting their domestic concerns.

Now I think there is only one way. We must take all the risks, I believe, of an absolutely open diplomacy. We in England who advocate democratic control of foreign affairs do not advocate it because we believe that a democracy can manage negotiations better than the experts in the foreign office. We don't believe that for a moment. But we have got to take some risk if we are to have the people of Europe educated at all in the question of foreign policies. For if these issues do not find a place in the newspapers, the people are not going to talk about these things at all. In the old days, when the deliberations of Parliament were secret, the proposal that they should be reported was met with the same kind of horror with which your diplomatists of today meet the suggestion that all their dispatches should be published. "What!" said these good country gentlemen in Parliament, "Subject the grave deliberations of our statesmen to the cackle of the hoi polloi? Why, it would be the end of all government!" Well, as a matter of fact, the first effect of publicity of parliamentary debates was rather outrageous public criticism, and it did render the parliamentary task much more difficult. But the final result has certainly been wholesome.

Therefore one means of precipitating the discussion of foreign affairs in your country is to insist, so far as possible, that any negotiations that take place shall be public. And apart from that, all those who are in relation in any way with public opinion, either as journalists, authors, university men, what you will, should utilize every factor they can, in order to concentrate the attention of the people upon this very grave problem which confronts them, which the public will finally settle.

It is only a question of whether the public will settle it without

knowledge or with knowledge. Because even where you have secret diplomacy, in the last resort it is your violent explosion of public opinion, as in the Spanish War, which settles the issues. It is finally public opinion which does settle these matters, anyway. The only question is, Will it be an informed public opinion or one that is not informed at all?